



Catholic Charities Looks back at Our Featured Agencies in *The New York Times* Neediest Cases Campaign



In Decembers past, millions of families made gift drives part of their holiday preparations, a way to share with others as they shopped for their own loved ones. But this year, annual traditions have had to change. Since March, charities and nonprofit organizations have marshaled forces for the holiday season, seeking out creative solutions to make sure the people they serve would have the things they need.

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‘I Know I’m Not Alone’: The Importance of Mentors Right Now

Last May, a 17-year-old from Queens lost his father, an essential worker, to Covid-19. For six months, the shy and soft-spoken teenager, whose name is Ansh and whose last name is being withheld for privacy, hardly left the one-bedroom apartment he shares with his mother in Astoria. “I felt so alone,” Ansh said. “I didn’t feel like anyone was there to support me, and I really needed someone who would.” In September, he found such a person. His mother, concerned about Ansh’s isolation, had reached out to a mentoring organization, [Bigs and Littles NYC](#), which matched him with Jared Stankowski of Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

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Facing Challenges Brought by the Pandemic, Helping People and Communities

When Adela and Martina Rivera learned last year that their mother, Olga, needed surgery for benign brain tumors, it was the potential aftermath that shattered them. Doctors said Ms. Rivera, now 40, could temporarily lose her ability to walk, talk or recognize her daughters. But she awoke within hours and immediately called out for them. “It was like a miracle,” Martina, 20, said during a recent joint video interview. Her mother’s speedy recovery was a major relief. But that fall, as stresses increased at home, the Rivera sisters, who were both seniors, were thinking of dropping out of high school.

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Cancer Cost Him a Kidney. The Pandemic Delayed A Transplant.

At age 19, he began serving 15 years in prison for drug possession, and afterward, he dedicated himself to helping others who had been in similar situations. Then eight years after his release, he was told he was in rapid kidney failure and had just two weeks to live. Mr. Sanchez, 52, found himself once again in this familiar Ping-Pong in December. A few days before he was set to receive his second kidney transplant, he learned he had kidney cancer. After the cancerous kidney was removed, he was ready to try again for the transplant when the coronavirus pandemic hit New York City. As the city came to a grinding halt, Mr. Sanchez's operation was postponed.

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Accustomed To Helping Others, They Now Find Themselves In Need

Until March, Gabriel and Constanca Merrill had both worked to provide food to seniors, she preparing the meals and he delivering them. But now, the couple has found themselves on the receiving end of food assistance after losing those jobs. “We’ve never gone to a food bank before,” Mr. Merrill, 71, said. “Now, we’re to the point where we can’t do anything. We never thought we would be in this situation at all.” Since their employer had to let them go in March because of curbed operations, the couple has survived off Social Security checks, and has yet to receive unemployment.

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